

MUSICAL NOTES & COMMENT

"Music and Nationalism: A Study of English Opera"

Cecil Forsyth's Book Commended to Serious Consideration from Students of Musical History.

THERE has been a prodigious expenditure of printer's ink in England and the United States of recent years in efforts to prove the reasonableness, the need and the educational value of opera composed to English words and of operas sung in English though originally set to foreign texts. Especially has this been the case in England since Mr. Beecham made his costly experiment in London a few years ago. The greater part of the discussion has turned on such questions as the merit and demerit of the English

Italian and German operas into French, and Italian and French operas into German, are just as faulty, just as flagrantly subversive of the spirit of the original works as translations of German, French and Italian operas into English; nor is he convinced that English opera, though the books be written in English and the music composed by English musicians, would by those tokens necessarily be examples of an English school. The goal of his desire is a species of opera which shall have its literary root in the English tongue and the music of which shall be forth English thought, English feeling, English taste, English striving—every element, in short, which enters into the character of the English people. But when he condemns nearly all the efforts which have been put forth in Great Britain because of their reflection of foreign influences, and holds up Purcell as the one supreme example to be



DR. T. A. ARNE (1710-1778).

genius of the men who struck out the new paths.

Very unnecessarily Mr. Forsyth begins his study of the reasons why some nations have developed national schools of composition while others have not—or, to be more specific, why the English people have never been able to develop a school of national opera, with the astonishing proposition that at bottom all peoples are equally musical.

The folksong of the Russian moujik is no better and no worse than that of the Greek fisherman; the Italian shipwright has his tune, and it stands on equal terms with that of the Somerset farmer; the Englishman may put into his song the wild poetry of his rocky northwest coast, the tenderness of his purple hillsides and the sudden awe of a glimpse across his lakes into the unseen world that lies beyond; but it is neither greater nor less than the uplifting religious song of the German peasant. Add to these what names you will, Scandinavian, Spanish, Scottish, even Persian and Hindu, mix and compare them as you like, and the utmost will be to find that in some cases the gleamers have come late into the field, and consequently their achievements are scanty, and in other cases the gleamers have come late into the field, and consequently their achievements are scanty, and in other cases the gleamers have come late into the field, and consequently their achievements are scanty.

Mr. Forsyth's soliloquy about the responsibility of the Infinite Being may be commendable, but it is very poor philosophy. Nothing is more obvious than that climatic, geographical, social and political conditions determine not only the quality but also the character of folksong—the spontaneous musical utterance of a people. Scandinavia and Russia are rich in affecting folksong because of the harshness of nature in the one case and the same cause, plus cruel social and political conditions, in the other. As races or peoples or tribes feel so do they sing. It is not necessary to be a learned musician to recognize that fact nor to account for it on scientific grounds. Mr. Macdonald recognized the fact when he wrote down the impression made upon him by the music of different peoples thus:

Spanish music: A hot night disturbed by a guitar. Irish music: My father once saw some emigrants from Lochaber die on the deck of an emigrant ship and weeping their eyes out. This feeling is the mother of a beautiful, merry heart to get out of thoughts that often lie too deep for tears. It is music of an oppressed, conquered but free feeling, impressive, faithful and generous people. It is for the harp in Tara's Hall.

As for Persian and Hindu music, it has as little relationship to the modern art (purely Occidental product) as Chinese or Siamese music, and if brought into the discussion of the influences which produce national schools of composition would do little more than clutter the argument.

After a hurried survey of the political and musical activities of the principal European countries from the eleventh to the nineteenth century Mr. Forsyth arrives at the conclusion that while the spirit of foreign enterprise and expansion may encourage literature and the plastic arts (as one of the results of wider observation of the objects which provide contents for those arts), a spirit of introspection is necessary for the development of music. These are not the author's words, but they reflect fairly, even if incompletely, his fundamental proposition. To show how musical creation differs from other forms of artistic creation he uses these words:

The painter, the sculptor and the poet gather in the things which they can see and touch and hear. They pass these sense-impressions through their minds and bring forth a version of them colored and modified by their personalities. The musician, wholly self-centred, passes through the same process, but the creative act begins in a lone interior. The poet, the painter, the sculptor use within four walls, give them light, paint, canvas, pen, ink, paper, clay—and in ten years they will produce nothing but from memory. Lock the musician up with his pen and paper, rob him of every external impression possible, take away even sight and hearing—and he will continue his artistic development unchecked by his surroundings.

The writer has no disposition to quarrel with this presentation of the essential difference between music and the other arts. Music has as little association with the other arts in respect of its contents as it has in respect of its materials. It has in its best and true state no object of imitation, and because of this, as well as for other reasons, it stands isolated from all the other products of the human mind. On the one hand are the things which are projected, grasped, comprehended by the intellect; on the other, in awe-inspiring solitude, outside the domain of reason and therefore beyond its reach, stands music, bodying forth the form of things unknown. It is a pure expression of the will, the most individual, the most lawless of the arts and the one most subject to change. Applying his theory to the various countries of Europe, Mr. Forsyth concludes that those which sat with their faces turned inward (which practised "interiorization," as he calls it) for a considerable period developed a musical art, while those whose faces were turned outward, which were bent on conquest and expansion, were barren of musical development. We are not sure that the author is quite fair in his treatment of his own country when he

treats the fine English school of music of the Elizabethan period as a "play of nature," apparently because it sprang up at a period in which no historian would say that England had her face steadfastly turned toward her own interior; but he presents his case in a curiously fascinating manner. According to his notion, England has for three hundred years presented a case of arrested development, not because she is less "musical" than any other nation, but that she has been engaged in doing other things, in commerce, industry, poetry, painting and so on, but that she has been expending her energy during that time in the one special form of national exteriorization which is fundamentally and psychologically opposed to the production of music.

OPERA IN ENGLAND.

Discussing the history of opera in England, Mr. Forsyth calls attention to three "types of mind" which, since the beginning of the eighteenth century, have been persistent factors in English artistic life. First, the aristocracy, rich, travelled, covered with "a cosmopolitan veneer and a species of intellectual snobbery." This class received Italian opera "not with understanding minds, but with open arms" and open purses. Outside of this class there was the larger theatre-going public, not able to pay for Italian opera and yet desirous of opera, and that opera in English—that is, national opera, the product of an English school. A portion of this public thought to attain its end by the creation of an English lyric drama in the Italian style, another portion by creating the ballad opera, in which the Italian style (the carrying on of the dialogue in recitative)

poetry; the procession of the drama itself "can be, and ought to be, restricted to such broad developments as we see in 'Tristan and Isolde,' while the movements of the actual characters on the stage can be, and ought to be, confined to those expressive 'ceremonial movements,' each one of which has a definite bearing on the drama."

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In taking leave of Mr. Forsyth's book it is pleasant to observe that he is of the opinion, despite his argument that England's efforts have been misdirected from the beginning, that there has been at least a small development of popular English opera, as can be seen by reading the scores of say "The Beggar's Opera" (the most famous work of the old ballad type), "Rosa" (by William Shield), "The Knight of Snowdon" (by Bishop), "The Night Dancers" (by Loder—the story, by the way, is like that of Puccini's "La Villi"), which made so monumental a fiasco at the Metropolitan Opera House in the season 1908-9, "The Mountain Sylph" (by Barlett), "The Midway" (by Sullivan), and "Shamus O'Brien" (by Stanford). To these we should like to add George Thomas's "Nadeshda" as a finer work in all respects than the average productions in Germany, France and Italy during the last quarter of a century.

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was openly flouted and which has developed in the present day into comic opera and musical comedy. Operatic history presents "the spectacle of a large mass (compensatively) of poor people producing certain relatively low art forms satisfactory to themselves, and a small number of rich people supporting certain art forms equally satisfactory to themselves. Each in turn is able to exert and does exert a negative and stultifying influence on the other, and

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this facing-both-ways position of the nation is reflected in the mental attitude of the class between—the composers—some of whom have always been engaged in developing popular music, while the rest have been producing works, as it were, in *exco*—works that were above and unrelated to the popular standards, but below the aristocratic standards, and only related to them in the way that today in England is related to yesterday in Germany.

THE ENGLISH OPERA OF THE FUTURE.

Mr. Forsyth is vigorous in his denunciation of "the pernicious cult of the foreigner" (Italian opera) and optimistically hopeful that, since the component parts of the empire are beginning to develop an individuality of their own, English music may attain a national style of expression and an English opera come into being. That opera, to conclude from his discussion and arguments, will use the English language, be English in subjects, eschew recitative, be free from the incongruities which characterize foreign opera; to sum up, "it will be opera such as Purcell imagined—an opera in which the drama is poetry and the music is employed to 'excite the

has been emphatically stated by persons in authority that the policy of the Metropolitan Opera Company heretofore has been to encourage the former and give no countenance to the latter. It is also more or less of an open secret that the revival of Mr. De Koven's "Robin Hood" was a large experiment made to discover whether or not the higher type of operetta, either original or adapted, could be made to pay by the enlistment of a better class of performers than that usually concerned in so-called "comic operas" and musical comedies. This experiment has been remarkably successful, and it would not be surprising if the Century Theatre in consequence should revert to what was partly its original purpose.

THE FUTURE OF OPERA IN ENGLAND.

Meanwhile, it is both interesting and instructive to learn what a large number of English musicians and critics think of the future of opera in England and the vexed question of language. This is made possible by the expressions of opinion gathered by M. Boulestin and published in the French music journal "S. I. M." last May. A number of excerpts follow:

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E. A. Baughan (critic): "I do not see why we should not be able to write lyric drama when our dramatic literature is improving day by day. Perhaps we have this idea, that the opera is a form of art very artificial and very illogical, and hence prefer to hear it in a foreign language, which masks for us its absurdity and its superficiality. . . . I wish to insist upon the establishment of a permanent opera, not only in London, but also in the largest cities of the provinces. Otherwise, the English composer will never succeed in getting his works performed. Let him have openings, and he will write opera as he has written, up to the present, oratorios and cantatas." H. E. K.

AT MUSIC STUDIOS.

Several original compositions by Frank Howard Warner were heard by invited guests at his studio, No. 51 West 27th street, on Sunday afternoon, May 12. They included piano pieces, played by the composer, besides several songs by Beatrice Pico, soprano, and William M. Meade, baritone, which were greatly enjoyed by those present. Mr. Warner performed piano solos for the Sunday evening entertainment, which took place at the Musicians' Club, on May 5, and on May 14 at a concert in Plainfield, N. J. He will teach piano pedagogy this summer in the New York School of Music and Arts, where he is piano instructor.

Dr. Alfred G. Robyn, the concert organist, has received the following letter from the ex-chairman of the music committee of the Tompkins Avenue Congregational Church, of Brooklyn: "With due respect and credit for the ability of others, in my judgment you are one of the greatest organists and choir directors who have ever occupied this position in Tompkins Avenue Congregational Church, Brooklyn. I count it a great pleasure to know you, and I want you to always feel that the ex-chairman of the music committee appreciates your efforts and its joy."

Mme. Esperanza Garrigue's pupil, Mrs. Virginia Moore, was heard as soloist at the Chaminade Club concert, Yonkers, on May 7, and at the day nursery concert on May 10, singing "Vissi d'Arte," from "La Tosca," and English songs. On May 12 Mrs. Moore sang at the Chapin School in connection with a talk on Mendelssohn. She sang "Hear Ye, Israel" ("Elijah"), and "Jerusalem, Thou That Killest."

Romualdo Sapio, formerly conductor at the Metropolitan Opera House, called yesterday on the steamship Duca d'Aosta for Italy, where he will spend the summer. He will return about October 1 to reopen his studio at No. 65 Central Park West.

At a matinee of music and drama arranged for the Musicians' Club of New York by David Blispham, president, which

S. Coleridge Taylor (composer): "I do not believe that the question of language has

Continued on third page.



HENRY PURCELL (1658-1695).

language as a vehicle for lyric-dramatic utterance, the excellence and defects of translations, the want of training in diction of English singers, their indistinctness of enunciation, etc. A smaller part has been devoted to the artistic value of the compositions, books and music, which English and American authors have put forth. English pride has been wounded by the reflection that England has no national school of opera, while other countries, like Italy, France, Germany and Russia, which are in nowise ahead of England in literature and the plastic arts, have nevertheless developed distinctive styles of operatic composition in which national tastes, predilections and capacities find expression.

This grievance is at the bottom of two books recently published in England, one of which is entitled to serious consideration from students of musical history in respect of what they think about the lyric drama as an indication of the musical culture of a community or a nation. It is published by Macmillan & Co., of London, and its title is "Music and Nationalism: A Study of English Opera," by Cecil Forsyth. Unlike so many of his colleagues who have been burdening the columns of newspapers and the pages of pamphlets, Mr. Forsyth does not content himself with lamenting the lack of popular appreciation of English opera and the want of municipal and governmental support of it, but boldly and seriously undertakes a philosophical inquiry into what he calls "the more general relationships of national life and musical productivity." He devotes a large portion of his book to a survey of the efforts that have been made in England during the last three centuries (that is, ever since the art-form was invented in Italy) to rehabilitate English opera and to a discussion of English opera books, the music in which they have been clothed, the adaptability of the vernacular to music, the faults of English singers and the absurdities of operatic translations; and he does all this in an extremely interesting manner. He also discusses the failure of Mr. Beecham's experiment, but here he has not much to offer that is new and little that can be said to have lasting value. The bulk of it is temporary polemic scarcely worth preservation in binders' wards.

THE NEED OF A NATIONAL GENIUS.

Mr. Forsyth is wise in seeing that governmental maintenance of a national opera house would not provide the panacea for which Mr. W. J. Galloway clamors in his books entitled "The Operatic Problem" (published some years ago) and "Musical

example point the way to the goal and compel a following. He may be a product of earlier strivings as Wagner was the continuator of Gluck, Beethoven, Weber and Marschner, but he must be strong enough to hew out an individual path, which shall be alluring to his people, and along which his contemporaries and successors shall gladly follow him, so that they, too, may reap of his success and his glory.

Two factors are here set down as essential—the genius who shall strike out the national notion, and the geniuses who shall adopt the notion and present it again in their manner. The limitation need not, indeed it must not, be slavish. Only one German composer since Wagner has successfully applied that great musical dramatist's system, and he, Humperdinck, knew how to modify it so that it must become subservient to the individualities of his style. All others have failed because they could not mix original inspiration with reflection. They copied the body only; they could not copy the spirit. Purcell had no successors in England, because before a capable man arose the Italian exotic had struck root in the soil of English fad and fashion, and was nurtured, as it has been ever since, by the English aristocracy.

FOLKSONG AND NATIONALISM.

The foundations of all national schools of composition in Europe, with the exception of the French and Italian, rest on folksong idioms; but the foundations were laid by such forward men as the Scandinavians, Gade and Grieg; the Pole, Chopin; the Russian, Glinka; and the Bohemian, Smetana. In each of these cases there was an element of national character which was initiated from the force which impressed this element upon the artistic music of the world, which introduced the characteristic flavor into the art works written in the classic forms, or modified those forms so that the vessel might better hold the contents, was the individual

England," which came from the press of the John Lane Company more recently, for if that were all that were needed we should have national schools of operatic composition in twice as many European countries as we have. Neither does he believe that nationalism in music is proclaimed by singing foreign operas in the language of the people for whom they are sung, though he does not take the pains to set forth the very pertinent fact that translations of

SIR HENRY ROWLEY BISHOP (1786-1855).

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SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN (1842-1900).

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